

Rural Nonprofits Look for Way to Boost Funding

By Doug Rauthe
In the "Saturday Forum"
The Daily Inter Lake
August 4, 2007

This Thursday an event of major significance to rural Americans will take place in Missoula. Members of the Council of Foundations, Sen. Max Baucus and a number of nonprofit leaders from across the country will come together in Missoula to discuss ways that the philanthropic community may help meet the needs of rural America by increasing rural funding.

Roughly 20 percent of the United States' population lives in rural areas such as Montana, and yet less than 1 percent of U.S. grantmaking foundations allocate any money to rural needs.

To make sense of that disparity, the National Committee for Responsive Philanthropy, a Washington-based research and advocacy organization for improving the responsiveness of this country's philanthropic sector, recently completed a report titled *Rural Philanthropy: Building Dialogue from Within*.

The report's findings ring true for most of the organizations that serve rural communities. It identified grantmakers' perceptions of rural life, geographical isolation and capacity-building needs as among the principal hurdles rural nonprofits must clear to secure their share of the hundreds of billions in foundation funding.

Northwest Montana Human Resources, a nonprofit based in Kalispell, and several others from around the country participated in focus groups that served as the basis for the report.

Focus group participants stressed the need for foundations to bridge the funding gap between urban and rural nonprofits to make grants more responsive to rural America.

Accomplishing that objective, however, requires more opportunities for rural nonprofits to meet with grantmakers and develop meaningful relationships. Developing these relationships is, in itself, a challenge since a majority of grantmakers are located a great distance away from many of the rural organizations and communities that need foundation support the most.

Another principal recommendation made in the NCRP report is for foundations to provide more flexible, multi-year grants to rural nonprofits to develop stronger infrastructure and to weather unforeseen challenges.

Without making real changes to the way grants are allocated, rural areas will remain underserved, bleeding out the heart of America's heartland.

Northwest Montana Human Resources, along with other rural nonprofits in Montana and across America, appreciate the efforts that our senior senator is making to raise awareness on this national issue for rural Americans.

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